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Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution: In Theory and Impact

By

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Political Science

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Introduction

Across the globe, the 20th century witnessed several instances of tyrannical regimes and leaders; Chairman Mao Zedong was argued by many to have been one of the most merciless tyrants that this era witnessed. A founder of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao Zedong was one of the most significant and controversial political actors in the last century. Chairman Mao became the leader of the People's Republic of China after declaring its existence in 1949, marking the beginning of both a communist regime in the East Asian territory and Mao's tyrannical reign.¹ Zedong can be remembered for several of his failed policies or programs aimed at converting China into a prosperous communist nation, such as his first Five-Year Plan, and The Great Leap Forward.² Many also remember Mao for the Great Sparrow Campaign, part of his Four Pests Campaign that resulted in a great famine that ended with over 30 million individuals dying.³ The most significant portion of Mao's legacy, however, is the decade-long Cultural Revolution, aimed at eliminating old ideas, habits, customs, and cultures of China, also known as the Old Four and his infamous political philosophical beliefs and writings.⁴ The Cultural Revolution severely crippled China's society, economy, and political atmosphere and millions of citizens died in its midst, one of the most violent and catastrophic times in modern China. Mao's rise to power and the Cultural Revolution and all that contributed to and resulted from both will be the main focus of my paper.

In the following sections, the conditions in 20th century China and the surrounding countries that led to the rise of a tyrant, particularly one as violent and ruthless as Zedong, will be examined. Once in power, Mao Zedong's programs implemented and actions taken, such as the socialist initiatives previously mentioned, contributed to the development of the devastating Cultural Revolution and therefore must be studied to understand how the revolution formed.

Chairman Mao's mobilization of the bourgeois must also be examined to understand how this contributed to his tyrannical regime and Cultural Revolution. Mao Zedong's infatuation with ideologies of past political figures, such as Marx and Lenin, are also crucial in understanding Mao's rise and will be investigated how such philosophies could contribute to the calamitous revolution and where Mao broke away from Marx's message. The Chinese communist revolution varied significantly from the Russian communist revolution as a result of Mao's break from Karl Marx's recommendations for a communist revolution. The impacts of the reign of Mao Zedong and his Cultural Revolution continue to resonate today and can be studied through direct, immediate impacts and long-reaching effects. China and its institutions have been forever changed by Mao Zedong's regime and the Cultural Revolution, and studying its beginnings, influences, and impacts will further understanding of the magnitude to which this instance of tyranny changed the modern world.

A Philosophical Understanding

What significant factors contribute to instances of tyranny?

Mao Zedong's philosophical basis can be attributed to the climate he grew up in, his experiences in this climate, and his education, particularly philosophical and political theoretical education. Mao often described his family's social class as "rich peasants", demonstrating a direct and inherent understanding of the struggles of the peasantry.⁵ For a portion of Mao's life, he was able to receive an education at a primary school in the area, until he was forced to stop his schooling in order to contribute to his family's sustainability by returning to work on the farm.⁶ Mao, determined to continue his education, continued to teach himself and eventually left home to continue his studies in Changsha at age sixteen.⁷ This was also inhibited for a short period when Mao joined a revolutionary party and experienced the fall of the Qing dynasty

firsthand.⁸ Throughout his secondary educational experiences and military service, Mao focused on theories of revolutions in the midst of waves of rebellion within China at this time, where much of his education stems from of revolution, theory, and government. His direct experiences with the peasantry, revolution, and the fall of a dynasty inherently contributed to Mao's philosophical beliefs and ideals through his rise to power and reign.

Mao studied Marx's writings intensely during his years of schooling and incorporated Marxism into his own political beliefs and agenda. This is evident as the structure of Mao's ideologies and revolution ideas are inherently modeled after several major points within *The Communist Manifesto*, one of Karl Marx's most well-known works. The issues and ideas described in this work resonated with Mao as issues he witnessed in his own society and time. In this manifesto, Marx explains the how historical development within societies has been accomplished and the inevitable demise of this order: class structure and exploitation of lower classes.⁹ Marx illustrates a narrative of class struggles between those being oppressed and those oppressing them, in this particular instance, the capitalist bourgeoisie oppressing the working class/proletariat.¹⁰ Through the proletariat's struggles, the bourgeoisie receives capital gains and wealth and creates historical developments, while the working class remains disadvantaged, poor, and with less resources.¹¹ The system of capitalism relies on an oppressed underclass, as the bourgeoisie's wealth is dependent upon the working class' struggles.¹² A resentment grows within the working class towards those exploiting them for their personal gain, and a revolution from the proletariat is inevitable to destabilize the bourgeoisie.¹³ This revolution and destabilization of the class in power will eventually lead to a classless society, where property, wealth, and other material objects are shared between citizens.¹⁴ Thus, capitalism inherently lays the seeds of its own demise, destined to collapse. Marx advises, "Let the ruling classes tremble at

a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.”¹⁵

Mao reflects a substantial amount of this argument in his own political writings and beliefs, but there is a point where Mao does not heed Marx’s recommendations entirely. While Mao agreed with the essence of Marx’s teachings, he also believed that Marxism-Leninism in a European context was not applicable across the board to every other country.¹⁶ He argued that Marxism should be adapted to fit the specifications and traditions of the country it is being implemented into, which is precisely what he attempted to do when he came into power.¹⁷ Mao mirrored Marx’s belief in the class struggles and exploitation of such, yet he broke away from Marx’s recommendations on the proletariat being the urban working class.¹⁸ Marx envisioned a communist revolution only being feasible within a society that is rooted in industrialization and a society of a peasant majority would be unable to effectively overthrow the structure in place.¹⁹ The peasantry made up the largest demographic in China in the 20th century, so Mao recognized that a revolution incited by the proletariat would not be effective. Mao’s vision for a proletariat is the agrarian peasant class, which is lower on the social class ladder than the working class.²⁰ A peasantry proletariat offers the most for carrying out a revolution in China at this time for several reasons. Firstly, they are more capable of breaking further away from imperialism than the bourgeoisie. Secondly, they are poor, which makes them more willing to do what is necessary to improve their living situation. These poor and starving peasants are more likely to be dissatisfied with the government and more desperate to take extreme measures to change their current state. Mao also viewed the peasantry as the equivalent to a “blank” political slate.²¹ Mao states, “A clean sheet of paper has no blotches, and so the newest and most beautiful words can be written on it,” meaning that those that have not been active in political discourse or revolution previously

can be molded to stand and fight for what one wishes them to represent.²² He believed he would be able to raise a class consciousness in this previously politically uninvolved group and shape the revolution he desired using the peasantry.²³

Additionally, Mao breaks away from Marx's recommendations pertaining to the underlying themes of these revolutions. Marx believes that history is molded by class struggles and social change that is motivated by economic forces.²⁴ The economic structure of a society that produces the conflicting classes that struggle for power over one another is ever-changing; the structure must be reorganized throughout time to coincide with advancing technology and means of production.²⁵ Thus, class struggles and social change throughout history stem from the economic structure needing to change to match production.²⁶ Mao, on the other hand, argues that human will and effort are the dominant agents to this type of revolution and social change.²⁷ Rather than focusing on an economic base as the underlying theme for social change and revolutionary history, Mao reworks Marx's beliefs to a theory of voluntarism, where history is sculpted by the will of mankind.²⁸ This reliance on human consciousness can be demonstrated throughout his programs, policies, and writings during his reign, as he stressed will of the people over material factors in creating revolutionary change.²⁹

Mao also argues that the peasants are denied access to culture and education by the classes above them, inciting a need for a "culture for the masses".³⁰ This belief contributed to Mao's desire to create a cultural revolution, one that was meant to be an on-going process, completed in stages.³¹ The first stage is new democracy, which varies from the previous democratic system in place, as this one will elevate the peasant class to the leadership role rather than the bourgeoisie; this stage is mainly aimed at uprooting systems or traditions of imperialism or feudalism lingering within a society.³² The second stage is one of socialism, which involves

restructuring both the economic and cultural institutional bases of the society.³³ Once these cultural institutions impede on the growth or restructuring of the economic base, there becomes a necessity for political and cultural reform.³⁴ Another aspect of this stage is an educational movement to familiarize the masses with ideological knowledge and self-reasoning skills in preparation of a cultural revolution, the next stage.³⁵ Mao argues, “Our educational policy must enable everyone who gets an education to develop morally, intellectually, and physically and to become cultured, social-minded workers,” demonstrating the socialist educating agenda this stage would implement.³⁶ The final stage is communism, the end result of an ongoing revolution that allows the classes and state as a whole to operate effectively, eliminating class struggles and capitalist motives or gains.³⁷ Marx discusses a similar method to Mao’s, which is inherently what Mao’s was modeled after, stating that the transition from capitalism to a communist state will happen in two stages: the revolutionary vanguard will lead the upheaval of the classes in power and system in place then the eventual communist state that results from this revolt will be classless and stateless.³⁸ Both of these stages discussed in Marx and Mao’s philosophies exemplify the theories that contributed to Mao’s regime, particularly the Chinese Cultural Revolution, an overwhelmingly devastating movement to China’s society, economy, and culture. Thus, philosophical education and interpretation can be vital components of tyrannical development. Ultimately, factors such as climate and past experiences do contribute to the creation of an instance of tyranny, but the most significant factor for this is philosophical education and interpretation, as demonstrated in Mao’s studies of Marx’s writings.

Why is this significant?

Understanding the impact that certain factors such as philosophical education, climate, and experiences have on a tyrant and their agenda or regime is incredibly important to not only

fully understand history but to prevent future tyrannical exemplars. Other historical philosophers have consistently advocated for philosophical education for the masses, evident in Plato's Republic and the Allegory of the Cave. Socrates paints a narrative of people that have been chained and living in a secluded and dark cave for the entirety of their lives and describes the challenges one of the described prisoners would face if he or she were to experience freedom.³⁹ The individual would be confused about what was or was not reality and blinded by the sudden surrounding of light, but the individual would become accustomed to the reality of freedom and light and look down upon this still in the cave.⁴⁰ While the initial reaction would be to leave those left in the cave in the darkness and carry on with his or her new lifestyle, this cannot be the case; the person who has been shown the light must now share this knowledge with those still in the darkness in order to fully understand the magnitude of the good and light.⁴¹ This allegory represents those within the ignorance of the cave finally being educated and enlightened with philosophical understanding, seeing the light, and then having a necessity to educate others of this philosophical knowledge so that they are also able to experience the light.

Theoretically, educating the masses with philosophical knowledge seems necessary, yet is this even possible? Not to mention, what is there to do when individuals take this knowledge and utilize it to become tyrants or are on a path toward tyranny? In the allegory of the cave, the philosopher that returns to educate those still living within the cave would be killed by the prisoners, as they know no other life than that within the shadows and ignorance.⁴² The philosopher attempting to describe the reality outside of the shadows of the cave would be lost upon the prisoners, and the prisoners would not allow the philosopher to free them from the fragmented reality that they know. This represents the virtual impossibility of mass philosophical

education; there are many that are unwilling or unable to accept worlds that they have not experienced nor understand.

In *The Republic*, Plato addresses these concerns as well through his depiction of the story of Glaucon, Adeimantus, Thrasymachus, and Socrates.⁴³ Brothers of Plato, sons of Ariston, and accomplished soldiers, Glaucon and Adeimantus are prime potential philosophers, yet they are in the midst of the struggle between the enticements and downfalls of tyranny and philosophy; they begin engaging in conversations with Socrates, a philosopher, and Thrasymachus, a self-interested and tyrannical sophist, attempting to decipher which route would be the most advantageous, and although Socrates is making stronger arguments, Thrasymachus's abrasive nature is resonating with the brothers.⁴⁴ This exemplifies that philosophical education is incredibly dependent on the methodology and behaviors of the pupil's teacher or mentor. Once an individual is already in power and demonstrating signs of tyrannical tendencies, Plato argues that these philosopher-king individuals should receive a new type of education, one where the individual's philosophical nature can be observed and corrected.⁴⁵ He argues that the ability to know is within the man himself, meaning that all have the potential to recognize, understand, and accept "the Good" and rule justly; the manner of education and the content ultimately contribute to this distinction between the routes of philosophy and tyranny.⁴⁶

Socrates, a moral philosopher, argues in favor of the practice of gently nurturing students in their journey for philosophical knowledge, whereas, Thrasymachus, an aggressive sophist, believes in an overpowering form of mastery as the preferred means of education.⁴⁷ Tyranny inherently favors this type of force and aggression over philosophy's methods of reason and persuasion. The explicit significance of the manner of those teaching an individual philosophy can be observed in Mao Zedong's life as well. Mao was taught by a progressive educator by the

name of Yi Peiji, who was a member of the Kuomintang (KMT), a revolutionary socialist Chinese political group, during his secondary education at the First Hunan Normal Provincial School, an institute aimed at preparing its students to become elementary school teachers.⁴⁸ Mao studied at First Normal between 1913 and 1918, then Yi Peiji was appointed to headmaster of the institution in 1920, where Peiji quickly hired several other teachers that reflected his “progressive” ideals and then appointed Mao to the position of acting principal for the elementary school that was attached to the normal school after reconnecting with his former pupil in Shanghai that year.⁴⁹ Peiji, aligning with socialist ideals himself, was able to influence Mao and the route that he traveled toward tyranny with Peiji’s overpowering teaching of knowledge and networking Mao into the movement by introducing him to senior members within the revolutionary movement and securing him a well-paying job, educating other young pupils.⁵⁰ Had Mao been educated and mentored by a different individual with varying ideologies and methodology from that of Peiji, it is possible that his path may have been different to some degree. Variances in how philosophy is taught by educators can be inherently dangerous for this very reason; some may choose the path of philosophy while others may head toward tyranny based on the method of learning. An equal and regulated opportunity of philosophical education is crucial, as if there is not this opportunity, that nation’s system of government will be weak and unjust due to unfit and underqualified individuals ruling.⁵¹ Philosophical education and how it is taught to a pupil is responsible for not only the path that the pupil embarks on, but also directly responsible for the effects and implications that said path caused in its turn. Thus, the Cultural Revolution and other atrocious events and impacts that Mao’s tyrannical reign created can be traced back and correlated to the teaching of philosophy to Mao.

The Impacts of Tyranny

Immediate Impacts on China as a Nation-State

Such philosophical education and influence contributed heavily to this tyrant, resulting in immediate and lasting devastating impacts on China and modern history. One of the most significant events of Mao Zedong's tyrannical rule was the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. The sheer complexity and enigmatic violent nature of the revolution makes it difficult for scholars to fully understand the revolution to date. An attempt to regain power within the Communist Party and the nation after his failed Great Leap Forward campaign, Mao Zedong launched the Cultural Revolution on May 16th, calling upon the younger masses to eliminate remaining traces of capitalism and the bourgeoisie.⁵² Known as the May 16 Notification, party officials in Beijing drafted a document, stating that the party had been infiltrated by enemies of the communist regime in attempts to overthrow the system to implement a bourgeoisie dictatorship.⁵³ Mao shut down the schools within the country and urged the youth to rise up and purge the impure representatives and factions that were plotting the demise of the communist regime.⁵⁴

Over the next decade, millions would be slaughtered and hundreds of millions more would suffer some extent of cruel or aggravated degradation and treatment at the hands of the revolution.⁵⁵ These large-scale massacres were carried out in several various classifications throughout the decade-long revolution. Some were initiated by mob forces and victims were either killed or forced to kill themselves in public settings.⁵⁶ Oftentimes, unarmed citizens were slaughtered by armed forces between mass factions and government entities.⁵⁷ Another form of the revolution's wide-spread massacres is the witch-hunting for political officials deemed to be involved in counterrevolutions or conspiring against the Chinese Communist Party.⁵⁸ In other cases, organized massacres against "class enemies" were led by mass factions, local party

officials or paramilitary groups, such as the Red Guards, which will be discussed in the following paragraph.⁵⁹ Less common than the other classifications is the execution of groups of prisoners from rival armed factions.⁶⁰

A substantial amount of the violence and bloodshed committed, specifically at the beginning of the revolution, was by the Red Guards, a paramilitary group that arose during the revolution and consisted of secondary school and university students that formed to assist Mao in combatting the revisionist bourgeoisie forces.⁶¹ At their initial formation, the Red Guards were praised by Mao and the party, deeming these groups as a “spontaneous grass-roots movement reflecting massive popular support for their policies” and “revolutionary fighters.”⁶² The structure of the Red Guard groups was inherently disorganized in its beginning, with various factions working toward unclear targets and creating utter chaos.⁶³ Certain facets within the Red Guard were eventually backed by specific leading officials, and the facets that lacked this organization ended up losing the power they were seizing.⁶⁴ These groups attacked and purged anyone they deemed to be a part of the bourgeoisie and local party leaders, beat the elderly in the streets, and terrorized any person that was not in direct alignment and conformity to the ideologies; their main target was the intellectual population, which posed the largest threat to the stability of the communist regime.⁶⁵ These mass organizations began to assume the positions of the officials that they were purging, creating a power-seizing movement.⁶⁶ The violence and purging of the Red Guards became so disorderly and uncontrollable that the government urged the group to retire into the countryside, and when these pleas did not prevail, the Chinese Red Army was called in to bring an end to the group’s factional violence but not before around a million individuals were slaughtered in the process.⁶⁷

In addition to the sheer bloodshed and mass murder during the Cultural Revolution, millions of Chinese citizens experienced some form of humiliation or degradation. Many elements of culture within Chinese society and those within these fields were degraded and the cultures stagnated, such as education and universities, press, media, and music during the purging in the revolution.⁶⁸ Specifically, teachers received the bulk of this treatment. There are countless accounts of incidents such as, “professors being forced to sit on stools and wear dunce caps while students taunted and accused them,” and “students painting their professors’ faces with chalk and ink, taunting them and spitting at them, all in the name of Chairman Mao.”⁶⁹ Additionally, “other eyewitnesses described teachers in a South China school being beaten while kneeling at a mass rally.”⁷⁰ This is an example of the type of mass killing that revolves around extreme humiliation and public killings of teachers and other intellectuals seen throughout the Cultural Revolution, which were also known as “struggle sessions”.⁷¹ Furthermore, “work teams” were sent out by officials within the Communist Party to ensure that the purging was being carried out effectively and in the manner that the party desired, and these teams were often criticized and purged themselves by the students, demonstrating the sheer brutal nature of these purges and groups.⁷² Art and religion also experienced this degradation, as activists and members of the Red Guard destroyed artwork and attacked Buddhist temples and Christian churches during the purging.⁷³ All of these efforts were in an attempt to eliminate the ‘Four Olds’ within Chinese society, being old customs, culture, habits, and ideas.⁷⁴

Additionally, the mass relocation of intellectuals and the urban working class into the countryside and Mao’s nationwide school closure during the Cultural Revolution contributed to the crippling of the economy.⁷⁵ A disruption in labor and production was caused by participation in the revolution and the removal of these groups from the labor pool, which also contributed to

the economic decline.⁷⁶ China, having a non-market economy, was unable to adapt to the labor and production shortages as the economy is dependent on coordination between administrations and trade organizations; thus, when the relations between the groups are interrupted, it causes the entire economic system to suffer and decline.⁷⁷ Economic output severely declined and directly contributed to the fall of the economy.

Apart from purging Mao's enemies from power, the Cultural Revolution was also aimed at forming new "organs of power" and government. Mao's original plan for a revolutionary committee form of government was hindered by the large-scale civil war type conflict ensuing throughout the nation, so Mao ignited several new campaigns to facilitate in the establishment of a new organization of power.⁷⁸ The first campaign being, "Cleanse the Class Ranks", aimed at identifying "class enemies" within the party that inherently did not exist and were only a paranoia of Mao was carried out between the latter half of 1967 and the beginning of 1968.⁷⁹ The campaign utilized tactics of "systematic torture, trial by suspicion, conviction by forced confessions, pogroms and other forms of mass killings."⁸⁰ This campaign was responsible for the largest amount of deaths during the Cultural Revolution with the estimated number of deaths being approximately half a million and another relatively three million citizens enduring some form of torture.⁸¹ In an attempt to regain order of power from the mass factions during this time in mid-1968, the party ordered these factions to cease their violent conflicts; this, in turn, created more armed conflict between the government officials and military and the forces of the rebel factions, often times resulting in the sweeping deaths of unarmed citizens.⁸² In the months following this conflict, the revolutionary committees were created throughout all of China's provinces by September of 1968.⁸³

Two years later at the beginning of 1970, Mao and the Communist Party introduced the “One Strike and Three Antis” political campaign to reinforce and stabilize the new power orders and structure.⁸⁴ The campaign was another tactic toward suppressing any counterrevolutionary uprisings or forces that could threaten the party of government body in place.⁸⁵ At this point, counterrevolutionaries were believed to be any individual that would criticize the Cultural Revolution openly.⁸⁶ Within ten months, nearly two million people were labeled and persecuted as counterrevolutionaries, infiltrators, or traitors and nearly 300,000 were imprisoned or killed. The amount of people of China that were impacted by this “New Organs of Power” Movement within the Cultural Revolution reached to be one-eighth of the entire population of China between the “Cleanse the Class Ranks” and “One Strike and Three Antis” political campaigns alone.⁸⁷ This subset within the revolution demonstrates the wide-scale murder of unarmed civilians, massacre by government groups and factions, and political witch-hunting.⁸⁸ Lastly within the “New Organs of Power”, Mao and his party used a final campaign in an attempt to justify and fortify the new power institutions known as the “Investigation on the May 16 Counterrevolutionary Clique.”⁸⁹ The May 16 Elements were the primary focus group of this campaign in attempts to dissolve the group; this group was a faction of the ultra-left Red Guards that was outlawed in 1967 due to the extreme radical nature of the faction.⁹⁰ The longest lasting campaign within the revolution, spanning from 1971 to 1976, allowed for further massacre against any person or group that was in opposition to the power organs and members of this counterrevolutionary group.⁹¹ This campaign lasted until the effective end of the Cultural Revolution.

The immediate impacts of Mao Zedong’s Cultural Revolution were incredibly devastating to the victims, deceased, tortured, or imprisoned, and the Chinese society overall.

Not only were millions killed, but hundreds of millions of other Chinese citizens were publicly degraded, beaten, or experienced some other form of extreme humiliation and embarrassment. The Great Proletariat Cultural Revolution was one of the most devastating events in modern history to a society, and this can be clearly understood through the propensity of the direct and immediate impacts the revolution had on its own citizens and society.

Lasting Impacts on China and Modern History

Not only did the Cultural Revolution's widespread massacres and upheaval of government officials and organs of power have devastating immediate impacts on China, but the revolution left lasting effects that continue to resonate today in modern China and modern history. One of the most significant long-term effects was the eroding of trust the public is able to have in its political leaders and government entities. A society that has a history or prior experience with a traumatizing event or leader such as China experienced with Mao is likely to have a lower level of trust for long periods of time following the actual incident.⁹² State-sponsored violence in this specific context and propensity and interrupted education correlate to significantly less trust within a society.⁹³ This lack of trust caused by the Mao's revolution then affects the legitimacy of the state and its institutions for decades to come. If the masses have no faith in, or worse, have hostility and distrust for their governmental officials and bodies, the legitimacy and survival of the state is in danger.

The Cultural Revolution's upheaval of urban classes and intellectuals and disruption of education across the nation has also left an educational gap between classes and generations in its society. The millions that were estimated to have been relocated into the countryside from their places in the cities were disadvantaged and unable to receive equal educational opportunities as the individuals that remained in the cities.⁹⁴ The intellectual potential and

capacity was effectively not realized because of this gap and underdevelopment.⁹⁵ As aforementioned, this educational disruption and inconsistency of education levels influences the level of trust that citizens have in their country and government as well. Mao's closure of educational institutes at the beginning of the Cultural Revolution still significantly affects educational opportunities in modern China as well. Many universities remained closed for long periods of time, and many of the ones that reopened were only able to do so by restructuring their selection process for students, the courses and content offered, and the evaluation methods for students.⁹⁶ Mao's Cultural Revolution directly impacted the educational capacity and gaps within the society and the structure of the education system entirely.

Lastly, Mao Zedong and the Cultural Revolution shaped modern history by facilitating one of the violent social revolutions seen in the modern day. The legacy of the Cultural Revolution and its unprecedented violence and brutality shape history and the study and understanding of tyranny. This revolution and tyrant also instigate a phenomena that must be evaluated and studied within historical contexts. Despite all of the bloodshed and anarchy, Mao Zedong is still highly honored within the Chinese Communist Party and the "state secrets" surrounding even more knowledge and insight into the brutality of the Cultural Revolution still remain unspoken about in Chinese society. Scholars and historians present this question often in studies of Mao Zedong and the exact devastating impacts he had on China.

Conclusion

Mao Zedong, one of the most ruthless and violent leaders in modern history was sculpted into the tyrant that he was by the climate he was raised in and personal experiences, but mostly, his philosophical education. Chairman Mao's foundation for his political ideologies and beliefs was based around Karl Marx, particularly his *Communist Manifesto*, in which he explains the

climate and nature of the society necessary to ignite a communist revolution, the groups that are capable and inevitably will lead the revolution, and how capitalism creates and perpetuates its own demise as the means of production and class struggles change. Mao reflects a substantial amount of what Marx argues in his own writing and ideologies, and models his stage-by-stage breakdown of how a communist revolution will transpire from Marx's ideas. Yet, he breaks from Marx in defining what group would be the leading force of the revolution. Marx argues for an urban working class, aligning with his reliance on the means of production influencing the revolution; Mao finds China's revolutionary base in the agrarian peasantry for a multitude of reasons, but primarily because he viewed this group as a "blank political slate", having the ability to mold their movement to his intentions and beliefs. He also relies heavily on the nature of human will to initiate and carry out a revolution over the influence of economic forces, as suggested by Marx. During Mao's education, he was taught and befriended by Yi Peiji, who was a member of the Kuomintang (KMT), a revolutionary socialist Chinese political group. Peiji provided Mao with financial security by getting Mao a job educating the youth at the school that Mao previously studied and brought Mao into the revolutionary movement. Peiji inherently had a significant impact on the route he embarked on toward tyranny through educating him and networking him to other members within the revolutionary political group. Due to the philosophical education he received and mentors he had, Mao's legacy will always be one of mass murder, bloody revolutions, and inhumanity through the immediate and lasting impacts that his reign has, particularly the Cultural Revolution. Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution and the millions of deaths, hundreds of millions victims of torment and degradation, economic decline, educational disruption, and perpetual distrust of political entities will forever be Mao's legacy.

Notes

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